

XXVI.

23.

THE ANTIDOTE OF CARE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA,

JULY 29, 1855.

BY B. M. PALMER, D. D.
PASTOR.

COLUMBIA, S. C.

PRINTED BY I. C. MORGAN.

1855.

JSC
248.32
P182A

.1VXX

CORRESPONDENCE.

COLUMBIA, S. C., July 29, 1855.

DEAR SIR,

At a meeting of the congregation of the 1st. Presbyterian Church, of Columbia, this afternoon, the following was unanimously agreed to :

WHEREAS, we have heard, with much gratification and instruction, the Sermon delivered by our Pastor, Rev. B. M. PALMER, D. D., this morning, and desire that it may be preserved for our own use, as well as the benefit of others,—Therefore,

Resolved, That Dr. Palmer be requested to furnish a copy for publication, and that a committee of three be appointed to carry out this object.

As a committee under the above, we would respectfully and earnestly solicit your prompt compliance, in furnishing the manuscript of your Sermon for the printer.

Very truly yours,

J. MCF. GASTON,
JNO. S. SCOTT,
ANDREW CRAWFORD.

COLUMBIA, S. C., July 30, 1855.

DEAR BRETHREN,

I am well aware that the interest created by the Sermon referred to in the resolution you have transmitted, is due simply to the subject discussed, and not to the artistic excellence of the Discourse itself. This, perhaps, is a reason for submitting it the more readily to your disposal; which I have concluded to do, from the conviction that while my Pastoral relations continue, you have a right to my labours

in any form agreeable or profitable to yourselves. As soon, therefore, as I can write it out, the Sermon will be furnished to the printer: and while the train of thought will be scrupulously preserved, I shall not attempt to re-produce the precise language; which, indeed, in an extemporaneous address, hastily prepared, it would be impossible to do with any thing like accuracy.

Very truly yours, in the bonds of Christ,

B. M. PALMER.

Messrs. J. MCF. GASTON,
JOHN S. SCOTT, } *Committee.*
AND'W. CRAWFORD, }

SERMON.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”—PHIL. 4: 6.

No one lives without the experience of care. The different relations we sustain in this world are all crowded with their respective duties, which impose corresponding obligations; and the mere sense of responsibility arising from these, without any accessories, is a sufficient source of anxiety. When to this is added that imperfect control over the persons or events with which each is connected, it is not surprising that the shoulders of so many stoop under the burdens they have neither strength to cast off, nor fortitude to bear. The schemes formed with the wisest forecast are suddenly thwarted by influences which were never anticipated, and issue at length in disappointment and sorrow: so that, with Solomon, we “look on all the works that our hands have wrought, and on the labour that we have laboured to do, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit, and there is no profit under the sun.” Hence, moralists of every age have found it a fruitful theme

of discourse, either to lift men above the sense of care, or else to reconcile them to the thorns which must always vex their repose. In so far as they have appealed to the natural resources of the human will, or have drawn their arguments from this world alone, they have signally failed. No considerations of the shortness of life, nor of the unavoidable necessity of these cares, have materially lightened their pressure, so long as they are felt. Unfortunately too, only here and there an athletic spirit gathers strength, like the fabled Antaeus, from such contact with earth, and achieves the stoicism which is so much admired; while weaker natures shrink away under the bondage of evils from which this proud philosophy finds for them no redemption. And though it should be universally attained, it remains a question whether the cold and stony hardness imparted to the character will prove a compensation for the very ulceration of the heart it is intended to relieve.

It is worthy of your notice how far the ethical teachings of the Bible transcend those of the noblest earthly schools. The doctrines of grace, always presupposed, even when not professedly expounded, underlie their moral instructions, just as the solid ribs of stone support the outer crust of earth.—Hence, they never amuse the care-worn believer with delusive counsel; which, however charming to

the ear, is always "broken to the hope." They point him at once to the hills above whence his strength cometh; and to the patient imitation of one, who bowed his soul unto death, in submissive endurance of his Father's will,—“who, though he were a son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered”: and they teach that thus “the trial of his faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” In the text, for example, the inspired oracle gives, in a single word, a perfect antidote to all care: a single word, more fruitful of peace than all the weighty apophthegms which human wisdom has strung together upon its ethical pages, like the beads of a rosary: “Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.” The exhortation, you perceive, is unqualified: “be careful,”—that is, be solicitous, or full of care about nothing,—but in every thing let your requests be made known to God. The counsel is not tendered in that doubtful and measured tone which marks one not well assured of the efficacy of his specific. It will meet every case. Whatever be the pressure of care, or the severity of affliction, the true and only remedy is found at the

mercy-seat. I propose, then, to consider the subject of prayer, in this particular relation to worldly perplexities and trials; and to show why its magic influence should dissipate the cares which swarm upon the soul with their offensive and corroding touch.

1. *In the first place, in prayer we are brought to an habitual and practical sense of the supreme will of a personal God.* When we have made a last analysis of the cares which annoy us, they are found to have their root in the conviction, more or less intense, of individual responsibility. The judge on the bench, the professional man in his office, the merchant on change, the parent among his children, the mistress in her house-hold, all feel themselves girded with weighty and irremissible trusts. The more these are pondered, the more heavy grows the pressure of responsibility upon the spirit; until not unfrequently a feverish anxiety is engendered, which leads to distempered and gloomy views of life, and by exhausting the resolution disqualifies from the healthful and patient discharge of duty. It is a special aggravation in almost every case when the refractory wills of those under our control refuse to bend to our authority; and the painful alternative presents itself of abandoning the line of duty which conscience recognizes, or of entering upon an obstinate struggle for the requisite ascendancy. So, too,

when events continually happen in providence which the utmost prudence could not foresee, and too stubborn to be worked into the plans antecedently laid down. When keenly alive to the responsibility of their positions in life, few spirits but are sorely chafed to feel, on the one hand, that they cannot be disrobed of these; and yet, on the other, to find themselves constantly defeated by the spirit of insubordination which will not brook restraint, or thwarted by new occurrences which throw up a front of resistance directly across their path.

It is obvious that these anxieties would instantly be terminated by complete exemption from responsibility in the cases supposed. If in no degree we are answerable for the results attained, no reason exists for irritation of spirit. That petulance engendered merely by the crossing of one's will, where no duties are imposed, and no responsibility accrues, meets with no sympathy from God's word; and as the sign of an imperious and haughty temper, is severely chastised at the hands of moralists. Whatever, therefore, shall tend to lighten this responsibility, will equally abridge these cares. For this reason, whenever, by association, this responsibility can be divided with others, there is a sensible mitigation of solicitude. The parent who is not left alone in the guidance of his household, and the merchant who can summon to his aid a partner equally implicated

in all the transactions of business, find as much relief from their joint counsels, as they do assistance from the division of their labours. Thus, "two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour: for, if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up." It is precisely in this aspect I would have you first regard prayer in its relation to the various annoyances of life. It brings us face to face with a personal God, whose supreme will we must trace in all the events of our history; and upon whom, if conscious of fidelity to his commands, we can throw, to a large extent, the responsibilities which otherwise must crush us with their weight.

Prayer is vastly more than the passionate outburst of imprisoned feeling, seeking blindly for a vent like the spurting of blood under the compression of a bandage. It is more than bald apostrophe to a lawless power which rushes on its pathway with the majesty of a hurricane, or with the impetuosity of an avalanche. It is the intelligent offering of our desires to a Being who can hear and be moved by our entreaties. Prayer is nothing, if it does not deeply and practically apprehend God in all the distinctness of his personality. Undiscovered by the senses of the body, He is clearly revealed to the eye of faith, which approaches His throne and touches the sceptre

which sways the destinies of a universe. Whether it articulates itself in forms of speech, or is embodied in those "unutterable groanings" which only He who knows the mind of the Spirit is able to translate, it equally recognises God as present, with intelligence to know, and with will to relieve. Wholly independent of the artificial symbols necessary to human intercourse, it is a communion more intimate than any which man holds with his fellow on earth: and the Christian is conscious that his supplications enter into the very ears of a present God, while the promises opened to his faith become the living voice of Jehovah in reply. Nor is this recognition of the Divine personality that meagre speculative assent, which may be learnt by rote from the stereotyped phrases of a scientific creed. It is an abiding and practical sense of it pervading the soul, which makes the Christian life beat with a swifter pulse, and gives complexion to all the thoughts and duties of the man. Such a sense of God as a living person, will lead us to bow with sacred deference before the supremacy of His will. God's agency is seen as clearly in the fall of a sparrow as in the creation of a planet, in the rustling of a leaf as in the crash of an empire. His supremacy is felt immeasurably to transcend that feeble dominion which the proudest earthly despot wields within the circle of his power: for it is not a supremacy over the person and fortune

alone, but over the mind and temper and heart; and is in so far denied, until every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of His will.

See now the bearing of this upon the subject we are considering. The man of prayer comes down from the mount of intercourse where he has talked face to face with God, as a man talketh with his friend. He surveys the lot which Providence has assigned for his inheritance in life. It may be one of great perplexity and toil; still it is the lot of God's choosing. Within his dwelling all the cares of this world may hive like swarms of bees; still they light not by chance, but come at the bidding of Him "who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." If untoward events thwart his fondest counsels, they are still threads woven into the web of Divine providence, which all have a purpose and an aim. He is not then wholly responsible for the trials of his earthly condition, but may share these with Him whom none shall dare to challenge. For himself, he is only responsible for his demeanor, for his humble submission to God's will, and for patient continuance in well-doing to the end. As for all the rest, he may cast his care upon One who careth for him. The peevish complaints of men in respect to the cares of this world surely proceed from want of consideration and of faith. If they would but pray and hold personal communion with

God, they would learn that all these come by the appointment of a will they would not desire to resist. They would know that if faithful to His service, they are accepted as surely in defeat as in success: and this reliance upon God's supremacy would afford precisely that support upon which the dependent spirit of a created being craves to lean. Their sense of individual responsibility would be lightened, and the axe laid at the root of all their anxieties. There are forms of bereavement in this world which no argument can reach, but that derived from the sovereignty of God. The stricken heart can only "be still and know that He is God." "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother." The argument is just as cogent for our trials as for our sorrows:

"It is the Lord—should I distrust,
Or contradict his will,
Who cannot do but what is just,
And must be righteous still?"

2. *Prayer leads to the contemplation of God in his Covenant relations to us, which will soften the lot otherwise rugged and difficult.* If a reflecting mind should be suddenly aroused to the necessity and privilege of prayer, without a single ray of previous instruction, several questions of vast importance

would immediately be suggested to his consideration. Will this infinite and glorious Being condescend to his low estate and bend an ear to his requests? How shall he find God, and by what avenue approach into His presence? Who will present him before the throne, and become his interpreter and advocate in that august court? How shall the vileness of his sins be covered from the sight of God's consuming holiness? By what title shall the Divine majesty be recognised, and what form of address shall he employ? Are any limitations placed upon his desires, or may he present every vagrant wish that finds a transient lodgement in his breast? And upon what warrant may he expect a determinate answer to his petitions? To all these inquiries the Scriptures return precise answers, our familiar acquaintance with which blunts the sense of their importance; and it requires an effort of imagination to throw ourselves into the position of such an inquirer, and to feel the agitation of his spirit until they are resolved. Still we can see that the exercise of prayer depends upon the answers which shall be returned; otherwise all access to a throne of Grace is barred.

The Bible, however, contains a written charter, which secures to the Christian all the immunities and privileges he enjoys: "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind,

and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." By this covenant the way of approach is opened through Christ by one Spirit unto the Father;—an advocate and intercessor is presented in "the Great High Priest that is passed into the Heavens, Jesus, the Son of God," so that we may "come boldly unto the throne of Grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need;"—an effectual plea is furnished, which may be urged in perfect assurance that whatsoever we ask the Father in the name of the Son, he will give it unto us;—nay, the very petitions which spring from our lips are indited by the indwelling Spirit, who "helpeth our infirmities," teaching "what we should pray for as we ought." The promises of this covenant, as they constitute the warrant, so they contain the very material of true prayer. They teach that certain blessings may be asked of God with an absolute expectation of their being granted, because known antecedently to be in accordance with "the good pleasure of His will"; as when the Christian prays for a sense of acceptance, or for increase of holiness. Certain other things, however, may be objects of desire, but can only be made properly the subjects of prayer under conditions mentally recognised, if not verbally enunciated by the petitioner; as when we pray for recovery from sickness, or for the increase of worldly posses-

sions. These particular things are nowhere in the covenant the subject of a specific promise ; and if our prayers embrace them, it must be with a reservation in favour of God's sovereignty, to which we are pledged to bow with docility and cheerfulness in whatever He may appoint. Thus, the Divine covenant, which opens the way and secures the answer of prayer, also regulates its exercise : so that it is not a lawless wishing, but the intelligent " offering up of our desires to God *for things agreeable to His will.*" It is thus plain that the Christian idea of prayer goes far beyond that inculcated by natural religion. The latter would construe prayer only as the language of a creature's dependance upon the infinite resources of an Almighty creator and benefactor. But, if the question be asked, how shall a *sinner* approach the awful holiness of God, and hold the communion with Him which is implied in prayer, it is *grace* only that can answer, by pointing to the mediation of Jesus Christ, and to the co-operation and assistance of the Holy Ghost. If it be asked, again, what shall form the subject-matter of our petitions, the answer is, those things which grace makes over in the promises of the Gospel as the inheritance of God's children. Prayer, therefore,—the prayer of a sinner,—must contemplate the covenant, as the only charter under which the sinner can hold any privileges, or claim any rights ; and it must

regard God, not merely in the natural relations of creator, preserver and benefactor, but in the gracious relations which He sustains by promise and by oath, of Father, redeemer and portion.

It requires now but a word to trace the influence of these views upon the perplexities and sorrows of the present life. Be it so, that the believer's lot is one of continuous vexation and solicitude, and at every point his will is contradicted, and his purposes defeated. His habitual and reverential study of the covenant assures him that these allotments are in no wise inconsistent with God's fatherly love, and form no evidence against his personal acceptance in Christ. On the contrary, if this life be a state of gracious discipline, he may expect his patience of hope, his cheerfulness of submission, his trustfulness of faith, to be tested by every variety of trial which earth can afford. If, through infinite mercy, his spirit is adorned with gracious tempers and dispositions, all the analogies of nature and providence will teach him that these can only grow to robustness and maturity by exercise, attended with pain and toil. If the unspeakable joys of Heaven are hereafter to be possessed in the way of gracious reward, the cares and sorrows of life are necessary for manifesting those traits of fidelity and constancy which will receive the plaudit "well done," at the last day. If, moreover, it is one of the dignities conferred upon

him to be anointed as a witness for God, how shall the riches of Divine grace be revealed through him as "a living epistle, known and read of all men," unless he is placed in situations beyond the power of nature to endure with equanimity and cheerfulness. And last of all, when his fortitude is about to yield under accumulated trials, the covenant directs him to God, as the source of supernatural strength; while the assurance "My grace is sufficient for thee," nerves him to present and future endurance. Thus, a mellow light, issuing from the covenant of grace, throws a softer hue upon these checkered earthly scenes. Just as from a lofty elevation the rugged objects left below shade off into harmonious parts of a lovely landscape, so from the mount of prayer our perplexities are viewed through an atmosphere of grace, which softens their deformities into the features of a wise and well-proportioned plan.

3. *Prayer compels us to take an inventory of our mercies, and to balance these against our trials.* In the text, the apostle uses three terms to indicate the nature of true prayer: "In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." This aggregation of descriptive terms is common in the New Testament, wherever this topic is discussed: as in Eph. vi. 18, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit"; and 1 Tim. ii: 1, "I exhort, therefore,

that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men." This reduplication of language should not be charged with tautology, even though we should not be able to attach a precise and different sense to each expression; since the fulness and vehemency of prayer are thereby implied. But I suppose a difference of signification may easily be traced. The first term, "prayer," is the most general of all, importing the wishes and desires presented to God for good things to be obtained. The second term, "supplication," refers to deprecatory petitions extorted from us by the pressure of evils, either already experienced or anticipated with dread. But I am now more particularly concerned with the third and last. It is not without emphasis that Paul here enumerates "thanksgiving" as an element of true prayer: since prominently in this is found that antidote of care which he is so earnestly recommending.

Few things conduce more to contentment than the habit of contrasting our circumstances with those of others less favoured in providence. While we sit brooding over our own trials, it is easy to fancy our lot peculiarly hard, until the festering discontent shall ripen into habitual peevishness. But the sight of other men's distresses will often dissipate the sore before it gathers into an imposthume. Let the

mistress of a well-appointed household, for example, whose soul is vexed by the cares incident to its control, view a poor widow, broken in spirit, oppressed with bodily suffering, stitching by a flickering lamp through the weary hours of night,—while in imagination she divides her gains between a black loaf for her hungry babes and the arrearage of rent which threatens to thrust her from a comfortless attic into the drains and gutters of the city;—and she will return grateful for the home which before it vexed her to keep, and for the domestics whom it was a trial to manage. Or, let the busy merchant, who frets angrily over the accounts of delinquent debtors staring out from the columns of his fat ledger, visit a brother suddenly overtaken with bankruptcy—his credit prostrate, his honor tainted, even hope itself crushed out under the iron-weight of irretrievable insolvency;—and he will turn with another heart to that long array of figures, thankful that he at least can strike a balance between his credits and his debits,—and while he sets the one over against the other, he will at least learn contentment. Or, let the anxious father, weary of the conflict with the hardy wills which he must restrain, enter the cell of some gloomy prison, through whose grated window streams just light enough to reveal the gray hairs of a more unfortunate parent, bowing with shame and

agony over the fetters of a profligate son;—and he will turn with stronger resolution to the long and weary task of paternal discipline.

These illustrations, you will admit, are tableaux of real life, and they are sufficient for my purpose. But prayer exerts the same wholesome influence by forcing us to perceive the contrasts in our own individual life. It is difficult to conceive of a true and full prayer, of which thanksgiving shall not be a prominent part. The very habit of referring to infinite goodness, as the source from which blessings are to be drawn, and to infinite power, by which anticipated ills are to be averted, will call up the remembrance of mercies already enjoyed. The petitioner will naturally seek for precedents in his own history, for the confirmation of his hope. He will remember former emergencies in which he cried unto the Lord and was delivered,—in the seventh trouble he will not forget the six which preceded. The deep gratitude of his soul will pour forth in praise and song. The sense of those mercies, none the less precious because the most common, will now be lively and strong; and he will bless God for the air he breathes, the light he sees, the health he enjoys, the food he eats, the raiment he wears, the reason he exercises, the sweets of domestic and social life, and the thousand pleasures which approach him by a thousand different avenues. At length, the swelling list over-

whelms him with its magnitude, and he bows with adoration before "the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift," whose "mercies are new every morning, and renewed every evening." Tell me now, if, in the sight of God's unnumbered favours, the seal of silence will not be placed upon every complaint, and each repining thought be led captive in the train of victorious and triumphant gratitude? If, then, in prayer we are led thus to survey the goodness of the Lord, we must needs be quiet amidst the discipline of care, and patiently endure those thorns in the flesh, "the messengers of Satan to buffet us lest we should be exalted above measure."

4. *Prayer imparts a tone to the spirit, girding it for the hour of trial.* Have you never found unexpected relief from the burdens of life through communion with some more heroic spirit, whose intercourse insensibly restores the elasticity which had begun to be weakened? He may not utter a single word of sympathy, and be entirely ignorant of your secret grief. Yet, as he discourses upon the nobler themes which interest himself, you are quietly drawn up to the higher summit-level on which he stands, and breathe a more bracing atmosphere. Introduced to a wider range of thought, you are mortified at the narrow circle of your own views, and blush for the feebleness of your own will. You at once per-

ceive that life has other elements than the petty cares which had absorbed your interest. The diversion of your mind to these, causes them to shrink back into their native littleness; and the emancipated soul comes forth to look at, and to work out, the higher mission to which it is now exalted. All this is but the influence which mind naturally exerts upon mind; for "as iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." But prayer is the loftiest of all intercourse, by so much as God is the loftiest of all beings. The reverence and awe inspired by a sense of the Divine majesty and holiness, take complete possession of the soul, swaying all its faculties. This is by a law similar in its operation, only infinitely higher in degree, to that mysterious ascendancy gained by superior natures over those of weaker mould: when, by an unaccountable fascination, all their powers are held as by a spell, whose control is irresistible like that of fate.

This, however, would be a low view in which to rest. The believer's communion with God, and his reception of strength, turn upon far higher principles than those of mere nature. By virtue of his union with Christ, there is a real, yet mysterious, communication of life and power from Him, "in whom" to this end "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." For this purpose the Holy Ghost,

the Comforter, is sent to abide with him forever. As the Spirit of Christ, He applies the grace which is treasured in Christ; communicating light in seasons of darkness, and strength in the hour of weakness. He dwells within the Christian, exerting his power immediately upon every faculty of his nature. This is clearly implied by the Apostle in the verse succeeding the text: "and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your minds and hearts through Christ Jesus." The expression, "*shall keep* your minds and hearts," is, in the original, a military metaphor,—“shall garrison your minds.”—There is, therefore, an influence of the Holy Ghost upon the *understanding* of the Christian, fortifying it against the infidel cavils which the seeming inequalities of Divine providence may easily suggest;—upon the *affections*, guarding them against the seductions of the world, and securing them to God's throne;—upon the *will*, strengthening it to bolder resistance in the time of strong temptation. By this immediate influence of the Spirit in the dispensation of grace, the permanent condition of the believer is one of security and peace: and this habitual serenity and composure of soul is itself a protection against the invasions of care and sorrow. “Be careful for nothing”—such is Paul's argument,—“only let your requests be made known to God”: and, as the result, “the peace of God will keep your minds and hearts”

with all the security of a garrison. This general and constant influence of true prayer upon the character is perhaps too much overlooked, even by Christians. We are prone to estimate the value of prayer only by the particular blessings it is the means of obtaining. That heroic tone of the spirit which is imparted by habitual communion with God—that tension of all our faculties, secured by the direct influence of the Holy Ghost,—is appreciated with more difficulty, and often undervalued, till the attention is distinctly drawn to it. And yet, upon this previous fortification of the soul depends, in a large degree, our safety in trouble and temptation. In the first access of these there is not composure enough to elaborate the principles upon which to fall back for support. They must be at hand and ready for use, as the surprised soldier can do nothing more than to unsling and present to the enemy his weapons of war, already burnished and charged. “Prayer keeps the Christian’s armour bright,” and his courage at the highest elevation, as knowing that he is ready for the onset, with his mind strung, and his spirit calm. All experience will testify that the Christian never yields under any pressure of sin and care, save as he loses the tone of spirit, which can only be preserved by earnest and habitual prayer continually fixing him at the throne of power and of grace.

5. Nearly allied to this is another influence of true

prayer, which, though scarcely separated by a sufficient logical difference, for the sake of distinctness, I prefer to throw under a special head: I refer to *the effect of prayer in bringing us to a distinct issue with ourselves in relation to our cares.* How often it happens that men bear, with exemplary cheerfulness, the heavy calamities of life, and yet betray the most unseemly peevishness under the petty annoyances of the passing hour? The reason is, God's hand is seen in one, and not in the other. The death of a friend, or the sudden loss of fortune, is recognised at once as coming by Divine appointment. But our cares are of the earth, earthy. We do not trace the connection between the waywardness of children, the indolence of servants, the delinquency of neighbours, and the controlling and disciplinary providence of God. There is, however, another reason: Calamities present usually a single front to us. Each one towers before us in its isolate grandeur and bleakness: and all the resources of nature and of grace are summoned to our aid. The whole soul is gathered up to meet the trial—all the strength and resolution we possess are marshalled—it is not the time to allow discord and schism between the faculties of our nature. If for a moment the water-spout bursts over us, and buries us many fathoms deep, by a natural buoyancy we rise to the surface again, and by self-recollection and prayer the whole man is united in

the resolution patiently to endure. Our cares, on the other hand, come upon us in detail. They swarm about us like bees—they cover every inch of surface upon us—their poisoned sting is felt at a thousand points at once: until, maddened with vexation and pain, we fume and stamp and fret, only to aggravate the petty enemies which bury their stings within us with tenfold greater fury. Like the foolish sheep in a thicket, we lacerate and tear our flesh with thorns and brambles, which would be powerless to harm if we would only be still and “possess our souls in patience.” Should any of you come to me for sympathy and counsel under the burden of your anxieties, I would probably address you in terms like the following: Are not these cares incident to the relations you sustain in life, and did not God bind them up together in the same ordination? Did you not yourselves select these relations, with distinct foreknowledge of these very cares? Would you, even now, consent to drop those, in order to be quit of these? If a parent, would you consent to be deprived of your children to be rid of their trouble?—if a house-holder, to be without a home to escape its vexations?—if a merchant, to lose your business to avoid its perplexities? If not, then by a new election of your will, you choose to be in the situations in which you are found. What, then, do you propose? What indeed remains, but to nerve

yourselves for the endurance of all that is annoying in your sphere? This, then, would be the point of my discourse: Since these cares are incidental to your positions, which you are unwilling to abandon; since they are imposed upon you by a providence which is wise and impartial; since they form a part of the education which in this school you are acquiring; do not suffer them to carry you by default. Come to an issue with yourselves in relation to them, precisely as you do in the weightier afflictions of life. Gather up all the faculties of your nature, and let them be knit and bound together by a single resolution to bear them with quietness and composure: in this sense utter the prayer of David, "*unite* my heart to fear thy name.*"

Now, this result, to which my counsels would tend, is more surely and pleasantly reached through the influence of prayer; which always brings us to a determinate issue upon the subject of our petitions. There is no prayer in God's sight unaccompanied by

* The Greek scholar will detect in the original, *μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε*, "be careful for nothing," an allusion to the schism produced in the soul by disturbing thoughts. It is the same word used in Mat. vi: 25-34, and in Luke xii: 11: 22-26, translated "taking thought." It is used in Luke x: 41, in Christ's rebuke to the troubled Martha, "thou art careful about many things." It is employed in the same sense of a divided mind in 1 Cor. vii: 32-34; in 1 Cor. xii: 25; and in Phil. ii: 20. It is derived from *μερισ*, *μεριζω*, a part, to divide; as Terence says, "cares draw the mind apart."—See Liddell & Scott's Greek and English Lexicon.

a clear and well-defined purpose. The man, for example, who prays to be delivered from the dominion of some easily besetting sin, or for the pardon of some particular transgression which has clouded his sense of reconciliation with the Almighty, but prays without any present purpose to forsake those sins, may at once give over his whining before God, who looks down with loathing and scorn upon his detestable meanness and hypocrisy. That purpose may be so weak as to yield under the first temptation that shall afterwards offer; yet, it must be honestly cherished in the soul, or the prayer itself is vacant of all meaning. So, if the Christian carries to the throne of Grace the many vexations of his lot, he can only be sincere, as with the aids of Divine grace he inwardly purposes to bear them without chafing and resentment.

6. *In prayer we apprehend the nearness of Heaven, which is a motive to submission and patience.* The Scriptures are full of the earnest longings of believers for the appearing of Jesus Christ and their introduction into Heaven. Ps. xvii: 20, "I shall be satisfied," says David, "when I awake in thy likeness." Phil. iii: 20, "For our conversation" says Paul, "is in Heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Phil. i: 23, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." 2 Cor. v: 2, "For in this we

groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from Heaven." Tit. ii: 13, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ."—These are but specimens from a large class of passages familiar to every ear. In no sense implying discontent or impatience, the Christian yet feels an estrangement from earth, a profound conviction that this is not his rest. A pilgrim and a stranger here, he "seeks a city which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God." Now, in no exercise in which he engages, is he so alive to his separation from earth, and his nearness to Heaven, as in prayer. The sweetness of that communion with God renders this world, save as a sphere of duty, wholly uncongenial to him; and forces him to cry out, "whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee"! He longs for that "crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give him in that day,"—his eye is dazzled by the brightness of that "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven" for him. If, then, in prayer, he apprehends this as near,—if, upon the delectable mountains, through the telescope, he can descry the shining city over the intervening hills and vales, why should he vex his soul by reason of the inconveniences of the road, which

is soon passed over, and which brings him to that glory?

“As when the weary traveller gains
The height of some o'erlooking hill,
His heart revives, if cross the plains
He eyes his home, though distant still :
While he surveys the much loved spot,
He slights the space that lies between ;
His past fatigues are now forgot,
Because his journey's end is seen.”

Such, then, are the aspects in which I would have you view the apostle's specific against earthly cares. I would sum up, by reminding you that this world, as the habitation of sinners, must of necessity be a world of anxiety. It is the imperative law of our being, from which none are permitted wholly to escape. In looking at the external advantages by which some appear to be preferred, it must be remembered there are secret trials belonging to these which escape the eye, and are known only to the sufferers and to God. After all, there is wonderful equality in the distributions of Providence among men: and if the vision could only be realized which is presented in one of the papers of the Spectator, in which every member of this complaining race deposits his cares in a separate heap, and all were permitted to make their own selection, it would end at last in every man's taking up his own burden as preferable to that of his neighbour. But I would ask, in

conclusion, if God has revealed to us an infallible antidote to care, what right have they to complain, who refuse to try its virtue? The remedy is infallible. Even the partial application which good men make of it, is sufficient to prove its intrinsic power—none have ever been disappointed in its use—and God assures us upon his oath, that it will never fail. We are stripped, then, of all excuse for petulance. And if men will not pray habitually, earnestly, persistently, they are convicted by the very murmurs they indulge.

If pains afflict, or wrongs oppress,
If cares distract, or fears dismay,
If guilt deject, if sin distress,
The remedy 's before thee—pray."

The fretful Christian is inexcusable, precisely in the same way with the unbelieving sinner; he does not use the remedy provided for his disease in the Gospel. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your minds and hearts, through Christ Jesus."